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Legislation Introduced By Rep. Matsui Will Make Cruise Vacations Safer for American Families

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (D-CA) applauded her colleagues on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and thanked Committee Chairman James L. Oberstar (D-MN) and Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee Chair Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) for their commitment to keep Americans aware and protected while on cruise vacations, and for bringing the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2009 before the full Committee for mark-up today. Representative Matsui introduced this legislation following holding multiple hearings which made apparent the gross inadequacies of current cruise safety provisions.

“This issue was originally brought to my attention by a constituent of mine, and in the past three years, I have met far too many American families which have incurred tragedy during what ought to be a relaxing vacation. The Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2009 will ensure the safety and protection of millions of Americans who embark on cruises each year,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “For far too long, American families have unknowingly been at risk on cruise ships.”

Rep. Matsui was contacted regarding the need for increased protections for Americans on cruise ships in April, 2006, when Sacramentan Laurie Dishman, wrote to her for help. Ms. Dishman was the victim of a sexual assault while on a cruise vacation, and was given no assistance by the cruise line in properly securing evidence of the assault, identifying her attacker who was an employee of the cruise ship, or prosecuting the crime once back on shore. Frustrated, she reached out to her Congresswoman for help.

“We learned during Congressional hearings that there has not been a conviction of an accused rape in recent history. With continued news coverage of recent rapes on cruise ships, it is clear that legislation is both urgent and necessary,” said Matsui. “I am hopeful that following the August District Work Period, we can take this legislation to the floor as expediently as possible.”

Upon learning of the recent legislative action taken by the House, Ms. Dishman shared her excitement towards the bill’s progress. “Congresswoman Matsui has taken the lead on this very important issue and has helped raise awareness about crimes on cruise ships all over the world. I cannot thank my Congresswoman enough for not only answering my letter, but for helping to make it safer for passengers when taking a cruise. She truly is my hero; and has stood by my side for the past 3½ years.”

Ken Carver, President of the International Cruise Victims, a non-profit organization of volunteers affected by cruise crimes, applauded the consideration of this legislation in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and Ms. Matsui’s vigilant efforts to pass this legislation. “This is a historic step in starting to improve the safety for all passengers on Cruise ships,” he said. “Congresswoman Matsui has taken the lead in the House on this issue, and her efforts have made the difference in moving this legislation forward.”

“Murky jurisdictional lines in international waters will no longer be an excuse for risking the safety of millions of passengers who board these vessels from American ports,” said Sen. Kerry. “Everyone from the passengers to the cruise line industry recognizes the need for reform - enforcing strict and fair protections is long past due. I applaud the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for moving forward with this legislation and thank Congresswoman Doris Matsui for partnering with me in the fight to strengthen security and safety measures, hold criminals accountable, and end the cycle of serious crimes on these vessels.”

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